

## Second Book Out of Walker's Portmanteau

THE success of Stuart Walker's volume of *Portmanteau Plays* has evidently encouraged the publisher to issue *More Portmanteau Plays*, which is in all respects but one a companion volume. Where the second differs from the first is in the inclusion of the play, *Jonathan Makes a Wish*, Stuart Walker's one original play that has received the baptism of Broadway fire outside the stage of the Portmanteau Theatre. While *Jonathan* was not commercially successful I am convinced that this was not altogether due to an inherent defect or shortcoming in the play, but to the absurd system by which a play is required to make good in a week or two or be withdrawn.

*Jonathan Makes a Wish* deserves a better fate than the storehouse; but in default of a repertory theatre which makes it a business to run good if not immediately successful plays until they have a reasonable chance of success, we are grateful to Mr. Walker (and to Mr. Edward Hale Bierstadt, who has been instrumental in publishing Mr. Walker's plays) for *Jonathan* between covers. One of the tests of a play—though not the most important—is its readability; and *Jonathan* reads well. In spite of its limitations, for it is neither a masterpiece nor a near masterpiece, it is a charming little fantasy of youth and dreams.

*The Lady of the Weeping Willow Tree* and *The Very Naked Boy* have often before been seen and appraised.

Mr. Bierstadt has written copiously, both in the introduction and in the appendix. Perhaps he felt that these three plays required prefatory matter of weight and dignity; in any event, he has said little about the plays—they need no explanation—but allowed himself to chat interestingly about the repertory theatre in America and Europe, about the war, and about the history of the Portmanteau Theatre subsequent to the publication of the first volume of *Portmanteau Plays*. However, Mr. Bierstadt is no apologist; he mounts the pulpit determined to have his say. And his say is readable and informative. As much cannot be said of many prefaces to plays. B. H. C.

**MORE PORTMANTEAU PLAYS.** By STUART WALKER. Edited with an introduction by EDWARD HALE BIERSTADT. Cincinnati: Stewart & Kidd Company.

## A Charm for Happiness

IT is hard to believe that a woman with any claim to humanity could turn a cold eye upon Berta Ruck's new romance, *The Disturbing Charm*. We say woman because you never can be sure of anything where men are concerned. Everything that goes to afford a tranquil, happy evening's reading is in the story, which is in the author's best vein; but we have no assurance that a tranquil, happy evening is what a man asks of literature. All women don't ask it for steady diet, but are ready to enjoy such an evening when it comes their way.

A group of young people, English, American and French, toward the close of the war are chosen by Olwen Howel-Jones as recipients of a charmed substance which she puts up in sachets for them. In her own case the powder is used in the difficult subjugation of a wounded British officer; in every case the charm seems to accomplish something. The fact that Olwen's powder was fern seed sent by a practical joker has no direct bearing on the case. The charm is real, even if it can't be reduced to powder, being something that the world is full of and which incidentally has spread itself over the pages of this book.

When Olwen suggests to a friend who has worn the charm to advantage that it sometimes causes mistakes, her reply is: "We hear of those just because they're the exceptions. We aren't so talked about, we with the happy love stories that the charm has worked." Which is truer of novels than it is of life. Authors are so sparing of the Arcadian touch! Not that they would deny the existence of Arcady, but that they find purgatory so much more

interesting to write about. Only an author, generally speaking, who places his readers before himself writes happy books, and even he has to set his teeth in order to keep to the altruistic path. Miss Ruck is determined to shun tragedy wherever possible, even if she has to go great lengths out of her way in order to avoid it. She makes one woman in this book deliberately relinquish a lover half her age—which is something to be remembered in these days of mixed generations.

**THE DISTURBING CHARM.** By BERTA RUCK. Dodd, Mead & Co.

## "Drowned Gold"

JULES VERNE died long ago, but his spirit still goes marching on. The fascination of extraordinary inventions being employed to defeat the apparently unconquerable aspects of natural forces is an old one. It crops up in tales of adventure constantly and is liable to do so as long as romance runs in the blood, which is another way of saying forever. Roy Norton takes a leaf from old Jules in his latest book, *Drowned Gold*, and he achieves his purpose with credit to himself and no discredit to the old French writer.

Three inventions, all of them seemingly plausible, furnish the chief ammunition wherewith the author peppers that old octopus, Dull Care. There is a marvelous submarine that can submerge to sixty fathoms, a light that is more wonderful than the Roentgen ray and can pierce a six inch plate of steel, and a salvage device that simplifies the retrieving of treasure from the maw of the sea. Mr. Norton escapes criticism by describing these inventions rather sketchily; they are left in obscurity as it were and must be blandly accepted by the reader if he is to enjoy the book.

As for the story itself it is rather episodic, but carried forward with some acceleration of sustained values during the latter part. The hero, Tom Hale, is the son of a famous old owner of ships and properly respected by men because of his paternal connection. Tom goes to Annapolis, rises to the rank of a commander in the navy, resigns at the dying request of his father to carry on the shipping business, and then gets mixed up with "Twisted" Jimmie Martin. With Jimmie come the real adventures, for the quaint character is the inventor of both the light and the salvage device. It is all a mystery at first and the reader is kept in the dark as to why the nefarious agents of the Hun are trying to steal Jimmie's papers.

Exciting encounters with these agents live the pages of the book after a love affair between Hale and Mary Sterritt, daughter of the head of a famous salvage firm, is hinted at. The climax comes when Hale attempts to convey a cargo of gold to France that will purchase a return from exile of an old French royalist. The ship is sunk by a German submarine, captained by the usual cultured Teuton count, who, by the way, is also a rival in love of Hale's. Naturally the German is circumvented, the cargo of bullion is raised and the course of true love made smooth before "finis" is reached. The fight between Hale and the German count over salvaging the lost ship is quite the most exciting part of the book, and it is here that the three Jules Verne inventions come in with their fine work and balance the scales in Hale's favor.

Mr. Norton is a felicitous narrator and manages to keep the reader on edge during most of the tale. He does this in spite of the fact that the book lamentably lags in certain portions and is loosely constructed throughout the first part. Several good though broadly conceived types are evident in Hale, "Twisted" Jimmie, Monsieur Perigord and old Mike Cochrane. The heroine is evidently lugged in because of a sense of duty to certain readers, but she does not matter much anyway. She disappears on page 15 and does not return until page 250. *Drowned Gold* was serialized in a Street & Smith publication, which may give some idea of its adventurous qualities. H. S. G.

**DROWNED GOLD.** By ROY NORTON. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

## Temple Bailey Says:

of *The Undeclared*, by J. C. Snaith: "I read the book with a growing sense of its greatness. I laid it down with a conviction of the author's genius."

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## Will Nothing Quell These German Spies?

IF Mrs. Baillie Reynolds is to be judged solely on literary excellence there can be no doubt that she has failed signally in the four stories contained in *Open Sesame*. But if she be judged, as she undoubtedly desires to be, on her merits as a romance pure and simple, a concocter of absorbing episodic tales that move with a rush to a melodramatic finish, her complete success may not be gainsaid.

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ous. The plots are deftly conceived and work with some degree of consistency to the desirable end of villainy thwarted and bliss.

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"OPEN SESAME!" By MRS. BAILLIE REYNOLDS. George H. Doran Company.

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